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News Release

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St. Paul woman pleads guilty to smuggling wildlife parts

Today in federal court a 56-year-old St. Paul woman pleaded guilty to bringing endangered-species and other wildlife parts into the country. Appearing before United States District Court Richard H. Kyle in St. Paul, Seng Her pleaded guilty to one count of smuggling goods into the U.S. She was indicted on December 9, 2009.

In her plea agreement, Her admitted that on November 28, 2007, she knowingly smuggled into the U.S. parts of an Asian elephant, which is on the endangered species list, as well as several dead exotic birds, including the yellow-vented flowerpecker, the tailorbird, the prinia, and the passerine. The undeclared importation of these animal parts is prohibited in the absence of proper permits, which Her did not possess. She was stopped by U.S. Customs & Border Protection officials at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport following a flight from Laos. The animal parts were concealed on her person.

The U.S. is a signatory on an international treaty aimed at protecting certain animal species from exploitation. The treaty provides that some protected species may be imported with appropriate permits. However, the parts Her smuggled were from animals for which permits would not be issued because of their endangered status. Moreover, birds may not be brought into the U.S. from Laos because Laos is an avian flu source country.

For her crimes, Her faces a potential maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. Judge Kyle will determine her sentence at a future date.

This case is the result of an investigation by the U.S. Department of the Interior-Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Customs and Border Protection. It is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney William J. Otteson.